



# News Release

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Contacts: [Marqise Allen](#), Communications Office  
[Kelly Stowe](#), Communications Office

360-236-4072  
360-236-4022

## **Marine biotoxins reach dangerous levels in Puget Sound and coastal areas**

**OLYMPIA** — High levels of naturally-occurring marine biotoxins have prompted the closure of recreational shellfish harvesting in portions of Hood Canal, along the outer coast, northern Puget Sound, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

In these areas, public beaches have been closed and private property owners are advised not to harvest shellfish until toxin levels decrease. Harvesters can [find the status of their harvest area on the Department of Health Shellfish Safety Maps](#).

“Knowing that a shellfish area is safe for harvest is important to avoid possible illness, and we’ve made that easy with our clickable maps,” said Laura Johnson with the agency’s Shellfish Licensing and Certification programs. “This year has been particularly active for marine biotoxins, leading to frequent closures of recreational harvesting areas. We’re opening and closing harvest areas every day. It’s extremely important to check our Shellfish Safety Maps before heading to a public beach or harvesting on your own property.”

Testing has shown dangerous levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) toxins near Hoodport in southern Hood Canal for the first time. At the same time, domoic acid levels along the outer coast have recently closed razor clam and crab harvests.

Marine biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing, and people can get very sick and may even die from eating contaminated shellfish. Symptoms of PSP can appear within minutes or hours and usually begin with tingling lips and tongue, moving to the hands and feet. This is followed by difficulty breathing and potentially death. Anyone who has eaten shellfish and begins having these symptoms should get medical help immediately.

Shellfish safety maps

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The state health department works with commercial harvesters in areas with increasing marine biotoxin levels to thoroughly test product before it can be harvested and sold. All commercially harvested shellfish currently on the market should be safe to eat.

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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